

# A SOLID START

*The American Angus Association's long-running, successful junior program has helped teach unforgettable life lessons for a multitude of members.*

BY LORI GILMORE



**M**aybe you can relate to the shy, reserved girl who didn't stray too far from her mother's side at the show. Or maybe you were the one willing to attempt any Angus activity.

Perhaps you never exhibited an animal at the national junior show, but you wouldn't have missed attending the annual summer event. Possibly you excelled in Angus activities offered in your state or region.

Perhaps the showing wasn't your "thing." Maybe you'd rather participate in the computer cow-calf competition, serve in a leadership position or compete in public speaking, team sales, photography or beef cook-off contests.

No matter the level of involvement, the particular area of appeal or your hometown, a significant proportion of the American Angus Association membership has benefited from taking part in activities offered by the world's largest junior beef breed organization. Years later some have remained in production agriculture, while others are employed in sectors serving the



industry. No matter the members' current careers, the Association's youth program, the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), has helped plant seeds for success.

"There are a number of adults who have grown up in the junior Angus program and today are raising Angus cattle," says James Fisher, the Association's director of junior activities. "Some are leaders in their state, while others have served as Association Board members. There are prominent breeders of Angus cattle who are that way because of junior programs."

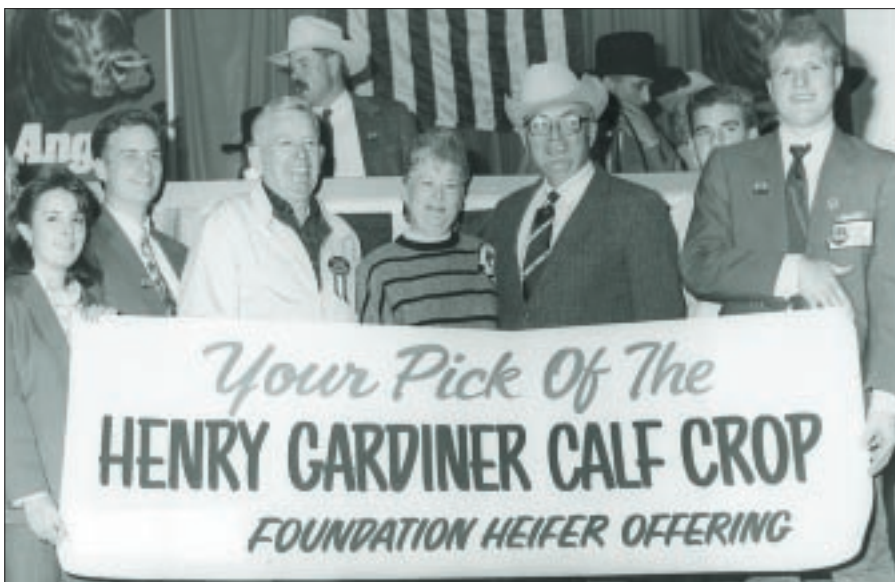
"Youth development is the heart of our breed association," says David McMahon, owner of Belle Point Ranch, Lavaca, Ark., and Angus Foundation benefactor. McMahon and his wife, Mary Ann, raised five children, all of whom were junior Angus members. Two daughters served on early NJAA Boards.

McMahon, an avid supporter of youth programs, wants to see the Association remain strong into the next century. He believes quality junior activities can help achieve this goal. "It's just a win-win, win-win situation all the way around," he says.

## ■ Looking back

Junior members have been an integral part of the No. 1 beef breed association for several decades. While the original intent secured a solid foundation for youth development, over the years teaching "life skills" has become increasingly important. Just as membership has grown — to more than 10,000 active members — so have the myriad of opportunities for Angus youth.

In setting the cornerstone, the Association Board voted in 1956 to hire a



The Angus Foundation was established in 1980 to support youth education and research activities. Much of the Foundation's funding is gained through the annual donation and purchase of a Foundation heifer. Above David McMahon, Belle Point Ranch, Lavaca, Ark., purchases a heifer donated by Henry and Nan Gardiner, Ashland, Kan.



**In 1967 the first National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest was held in conjunction with the All-American Breeders' Futurity in Lexington, Ky. For the first time, state leaders had an opportunity to compete at the national level.**



**In 1956 Val Brundgardt became the first full-time employee to direct Angus youth activities. Soon after, the Association moved from Chicago to St. Joseph, Mo., where a new program was introduced to help young people with Angus livestock projects.**

full-time employee to direct junior activities. Just after the breed headquarters moved from the Chicago Stockyards to St. Joseph, Mo., the Association introduced a program to help young people with Angus livestock projects.

"I think we have to give credit to the late Frank Richards, Association secretary, and his Board for having the foresight to see the need and get something started," says Dean Hurlbut. In 1957 Hurlbut became the Association's second director of junior activities, a position he held for 15 years.

#### ■ Starting out

In 1956 Lyle Haring, Association fieldman, and Ed Stout, Missouri Angus Association fieldman, formed the first state junior Angus association. One year later Hurlbut joined the Association and worked to establish additional state junior groups.

These newly formed grassroots organizations were closely patterned after adult associations.

In those days state field days served as the main tool to recruit new members. "There would be fitting, grooming and showmanship demonstrations, judging contests and a lot of sloppy joes and baked beans," Hurlbut says. "We were trying to get parents to bring their kids to learn more about showing and fitting."

Dave Nichols of Nichols Farms, Bridgewater, Iowa, grew up participating in youth organizations. As an Iowa Junior Angus Association member, he recalls serving as an officer and helping Haring conduct field days.

"While I was active in both 4-H and FFA and held state offices in both, my Angus junior activities were more focused on what I had chosen to do with my life," Nichols says. "My involvement in the Iowa Junior Angus Association gave me the confidence to pursue my goal of becoming a nationally recognized source of high-quality Angus seedstock."

Today Nichols' southwestern Iowa beef operation raises multiple livestock breeds, including more than 1,200 females, half of which are Angus. Each year Nichols Farms sells nearly 500 bulls. The program has exported semen, embryos and live animals to 28 foreign countries.

#### ■ Introducing a national event

While state field days played a notable part from the start, it wasn't until 1967 that the first national breed youth competition debuted. That year the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest was held in

Lexington, Ky., in conjunction with the All-American Angus Breeders' Futurity.

"In setting it up, we were trying to get state leaders to compete at the national level," Hurlbut says of the Association-sponsored showmanship contest. In the beginning, he says, it was not uncommon to have 70 showmanship contestants compete for the top title. Much like today's national showmanship event, two juniors representing each state could advance to the national level.

Randy Daniel of Colbert, Ga., remembers competing at the inaugural event. "I was 15 and the youngest person," he says. This Georgia Junior Angus Association representative finished fourth in the first showmanship contest.

"Most of us [who] are actively involved in the cattle business can trace our love for the business to our desire to compete in junior organizations," says Daniel, the owner of Partisover Ranch, a family Angus and commercial operation.

Daniel, an alumnus of the University of Georgia, judges many livestock shows each year. His resumé includes judging seven national junior breed shows. In 1996 he evaluated the steer entries at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) held in Kansas City, Mo.

As a junior exhibitor, Daniel exhibited both Angus and Hereford cattle. "The main reason I wanted to be involved in the junior Angus association in Georgia is that they were more active than the others," Daniel says. "It was the one you wanted to join."

Daniel credits energetic junior members, as well as tireless adult volunteers, for making his junior Angus experiences memorable. Each year the Georgia group raised money to attend the All-American Angus Breeders' Futurity. It was at this event that the young people had an opportunity to meet Angus breeders from across the country, according to Daniel. "It was a big deal for us."

Today the next generation of the Daniel family is active in Angus youth activities. Randy and his wife, Beth, have two children, Buck, 15, and Whitney, 13. Each year the family travels and competes at local, state and national livestock shows.

#### ■ Providing a national show

The Association Board, recognizing the immediate success of the showmanship contest, soon followed with a national junior show in 1969. According to Hurlbut, the NJAS originated as a separate event from the showmanship contest. That first year, junior exhibitors brought 103 Angus heifers to Columbia, Mo. Later, in 1974, the

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## A SOLID START CONTINUED

National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest was moved from Kentucky and ever since has been held in conjunction with the NJAS.

Over the years, the national show expanded to include bull, steer, cow-calf pairs and bred-and-owned divisions. Last summer in Indianapolis, Ind., 563 junior participants from 30 states exhibited 984 Angus entries. This July, 700 juniors from 33 states exhibited 1,029 entries.

Today, 30 years after its inception, the mid-summer event is not limited to showing participation; interested junior members can compete in a variety of individual and team contests. A summary of this year's NJAS begins on page 97.

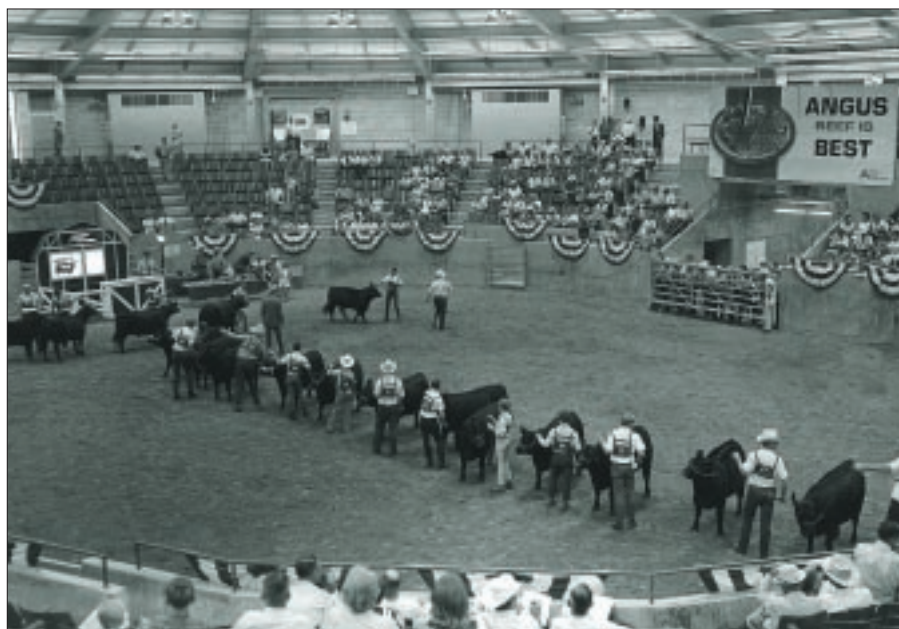
### ■ Forming an official youth organization

Growing interest in state associations, in addition to the immediate success of the two national competitions, set the stage for forming a national youth organization. In the early 1980s, under the direction of Jerry Lipsey, then director of junior activities and now chief executive officer of the American Simmental Association, an official youth organization was created.

At the 12th NJAS in Wichita, Kan., in 1980, the NJAA was officially formed, and the first 12-member Angus youth board was elected. Prior to that, all junior Angus activities centered around the showing. Earlier in the year, breeders had established the Angus Foundation to fund a variety of youth programs and opportunities. This momentous move allowed educational programs to emerge.

Julie McMahan, an Arkansas junior Angus member, served on the inaugural national junior Board. "It was pretty exciting because we hadn't done anything like that before," she says.

Although she had been a state leader and had exhibited cattle at several national shows, McMahan had hesitated about



**Recognizing the success of the first showmanship contest in 1967, the Association followed suit with a national junior show in Columbia, Mo., two years later. After 1973, the showmanship contest would be held in conjunction with the national junior show.**

pursuing a position. "Richard Dyar, our Association regional manager, came to me at the state show that winter and said, 'They are going to organize the National Junior Angus Association, and I think you should run,'" McMahan says. "That was the first time I felt anybody outside my family recognized my potential."

Since the novice organization lacked established guidelines, McMahan recalls drawing straws to determine term lengths. She drew two years, and later served as the second national chairman in 1981-82.

"I really credit Dr. Lipsey and his leadership style," she says. "He was careful not to overprogram the result, and that allowed the NJAA a chance to blossom from a youth perspective. I also feel he was carrying out a lot of Dean Hurlbut's vision."

Now, looking back nearly 20 years later, this Texas entrepreneur still lives by the

lessons learned through her early NJAA experiences.

"It's all up to you as a kid," she says. "How much are you going to give? What are you going to throw yourself out there to do? Are you going to show your heifer? Enter in showmanship? Make that speech? If you only do one thing or if you do everything, it's all up to you how you want to measure it later."

Today this Oklahoma State University alumna and former Texas Angus Association executive director owns and operates Creative Exchange, an advertising and marketing business based in the historic Fort Worth Stockyards Exchange Building. Some of her clients manage Angus programs, including her family's Arkansas operation, Belle Point Ranch.

"The junior program put the framework together for a network that never existed before," she says. "From 1980 to 1999, and

## NJAA TIME LINE

1951	1956	1967	1969	1974
First junior membership issued	Junior activities program established	First National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, Lexington, Ky.	First National Junior Angus Heifer Show held in conjunction with the National Conference, Columbia, Mo.	First time National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest held in conjunction with the NJAS



**The American Angus Auxiliary and state auxiliaries have been steady supporters of junior activities, sponsoring awards, contests, ambassador programs and scholarships to reward juniors for their participation.**



**"I believe youth are our future," says Angus Foundation president and Association vice president Charles "Bud" Smith (second from left). "Organizations such as what we have definitely build and develop great leaders — not only Angus breeders, but as national leaders. And I'd put the future of our country in the hands of the young people [who] are involved with Angus activities."**

40 years hence, there will be a network of people within the American Angus Association membership who know, trust and respect each other, probably differently than anyone who has come before us."

#### ■ Serving as volunteer leaders

Linda Mrotek Alexander, a past president of the Virginia Junior Angus Association

and past state Angus queen, also attended early NJAA gatherings, where she served as a voting delegate.

While a majority of her Angus activities focused on state and regional junior competitions, Alexander traveled one summer with her family to the NJAS in Milwaukee, Wis., as Virginia's showmanship contestant.

"It was an honor just to be a part of it," she says. "It's awesome to feel the excitement."

Presently Alexander, a graduate of Virginia Tech, is employed as a sales manager for Breeder's World, an Internet livestock directory. She and her husband, Chuck, run a small herd, Turning Point Angus, based in Berryville, Va.

Now as an active adult member in her home state, Alexander appreciates the opportunities she experienced as an Angus junior. She is giving back to the organization by volunteering as an advisor for the Northern Virginia Junior Angus Association.

"We've always been active with youth," says the mother of two young children. "I guess that is part of who we are."

Along with being a junior advisor, Alexander serves as chairman of Virginia's Northern District 4-H/FFA Show. This past year the Alexanders also worked with several other northern Virginia Angus breeders to introduce the Mid-Atlantic Junior Angus Classic (MAJAC). According to Alexander, in addition to providing another show for junior Angus exhibitors, MAJAC provides family fun and educational activities.

This Virginia volunteer encourages others to take time to serve as adult advisors and mentors. "Be there for them. Work with, teach and help them learn because it's a wonderful foundation," she says.

"One key to the success of the junior program is the volunteer leadership that we get at the state level from junior advisors

and state associations," says Fisher, the Association's director of junior activities since 1991. "Those adults are providing leadership on a volunteer basis to help young people. We could not offer the junior programs we do without them."

Angus Foundation president and Association vice president Charles "Bud" Smith Jr. agrees, saying, "I have seen what it has done for my family and in my state." Although Smith grew up raising Angus cattle in Russell Springs, Ky., he first became involved with the NJAA through his children. Smith has served as a state junior advisor in Kentucky and is a past advisor to the NJAA Board.

Today this Association leader believes the breed's junior program is second-to-none. "Our young people are a great asset to the American Angus Association," he says.

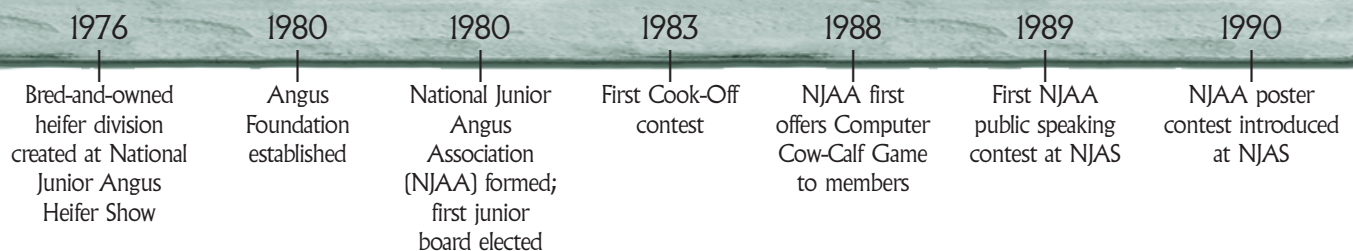
"It's a wonderful way of life," says Smith, borrowing a slogan adopted by the Kentucky juniors for a fund-raiser several years ago. "It's also wonderful for us adults to watch them grow and mature. The NJAA gives young people an opportunity that a lot of times they wouldn't have.

"Not only do I think about the learning experiences that these kids are able to attain, but the special friendships that they make," he says.

Growth of the junior activities wouldn't be possible without adult support, says *Angus Journal* editor Shauna Hermel. She adds, "Some of the most unsung supporters of junior activities are the ladies of the American Angus Auxiliary and each state auxiliary. As I grew up through the ranks of the Missouri and National Junior Angus associations, the ladies of the Auxiliary were steady supporters of our state and national activities."

Their sponsorship of contests, awards and scholarships is only part of the story.

"As a shy youngster, it's so much easier to become involved in activities when there are people, besides your family, encouraging







**“It’s about providing an avenue for a kid to succeed,” says Kelly Coonrad (front row, second from left), a former NJAA Board member who is now the Valley High School FFA advisor in Gilcrest, Colo. “If we don’t provide [the kids] positive things to get involved in, they’ll find a lot of other things.”**

you to try and telling you they believe in you,” says Hermel. “I owe a lot to the ladies of the Missouri, Iowa and American Angus auxiliaries for giving me the confidence to compete and the means to do it.”

■ **Forming lifelong friendships**

A memorable part of Kellie Coonrad’s experience as a Washington Junior Angus Association member involved meeting people from other states. “Some of the best friends that I have today I met through the National Junior Angus Association,” says the former NJAA Board member from eastern Washington. She served as NJAA vice chairman in 1991.

For Coonrad and her three older siblings, much like countless other juniors, Angus youth activities were considered a “family thing.” “There was a lot of road time traveling to various junior activities in the Western region,” she recalls.

Now, as an agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor for Valley High School in Gilcrest, Colo., she believes this time together is very important in a young person’s life.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for families to really get to know the things that are important to their kids,” she says. Coonrad,

a graduate of Washington State and Colorado State universities, just completed her third year of teaching in a school located 60 miles north of Denver.

Even though it was always too far to haul cattle to the national junior show, the Coonrad family didn’t miss the chance to compete at the NJAS. “We’d charter a bus in the northwest region and take about 40 juniors each year,” she says. Her parents, Dan and Karen Coonrad, often would serve as chaperones.

Coonrad competed in public speaking, showmanship and the Auxiliary-sponsored *Certified Angus Beef*™ Cook-Off. At the NJAS in Springfield, Ill., the Washington cook-off team won. Other highlights for this junior included finishing first in the speech contest and second in showmanship.

“That’s the neat thing about the National Junior Angus Association,” says Coonrad. “We were able to participate even if we weren’t able to show.” She goes on to say, “One of the most important things we can do as an Association is offer kids a lot of different avenues to be active.”

■ **Adding activities**

Since the formation of the NJAA Board,



**Rhonda Nida, 1998-99 NJAA vice chairman from Red Rock, Okla., says she learned a lot about responsibility and hard work from her junior involvement. “If parents want their children to meet great people and learn a lot of skills to prepare them in life, then they need to encourage them to participate in the NJAA.”**

a variety of contests have been introduced to the NJAS lineup. First came the cook-off in 1983. Next, the national scrapbook, public speaking and poster contests. Team sales debuted in 1991. Since then, photography and extemporaneous public speaking contests have been implemented. And new for 1999, a graphic-design competition.

“These contests give juniors a taste of ‘real-world’ issues affecting the cattle business — both registered and commercial,” says Matt Perrier, Association regional manager for Texas and New Mexico.

This former Kansas junior Angus member mainly benefited from options offered outside the showing, including the computer cow-calf game. Perrier grew up near Eureka, Kan., where his family operates Dalebanks Angus. He competed in showmanship and team sales on the national level and helped plan an NJAS. In 1994 this active Kansas junior — who never held a state leadership position — joined the NJAA Board. He served as chairman in 1995.

“Through this leadership experience I learned to work with a variety of people

**NJAA TIME LINE**







**“Through this leadership experience I learned to work with a variety of people from extremely diverse backgrounds with one common interest — Angus cattle,” says former junior Board member Matt Perrier (right). Perrier now serves as an Association regional manager. (Also pictured is fellow regional manager Rod Wesselman.)**

from extremely diverse backgrounds with one common interest — Angus cattle,” says the Kansas State University (K-State) graduate.

Not only can participation help young people learn to relate to others, it fosters a strong work ethic. That is how current NJAA member Rhonda Nida of Red Rock, Okla., says she has benefited. “Growing up in the NJAA, I have learned a lot about responsibility and hard work,” she says.

The 1998-99 NJAA vice chairman became involved at an early age. At 12, this young state leader remembers serving as a voting delegate at the NJAS. After that, she advanced to numerous state leadership positions.

During her NJAA experience, Nida has exhibited some champions in the showing, won the NJAS public speaking contest and competed on several winning cook-off teams.

Last summer this K-State junior, majoring in agricultural journalism and animal science, received a Foundation scholarship for \$1,000. It was the first time the Foundation presented \$20,000 worth of scholarships to 17 juniors.

In supporting leadership development, the Foundation also funds programs such as Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD). Introduced in 1993, the national LEAD conferences emphasize leadership training and development opportunities for Angus youth. NJAA Directors help plan and conduct various sessions at this annual conference.

Today the NJAA involves more than just showing Angus cattle. For young people under the age of 21, opportunities are there for personal growth.

“If parents want their children to meet

## Sending off spokespeople

Credit-depressed commodity prices, coupled with American farmers and ranchers becoming increasingly efficient, may account for a growing percentage of young people pursuing careers outside of agriculture and the Angus business.

The good news is, early lessons learned through participation in youth organizations can be carried through life as young people become successful in their chosen careers, whether it includes animal agriculture or not.

“Today the mission of the American Angus Association’s junior activities is to help create a better understanding of the total beef industry and give young people the skills and knowledge to become leaders,” says James Fisher, director of junior activities for the American Angus Association.

Association Board member Brian McCulloh of Viroqua, Wis., understands the livestock breed organization’s role in training future leaders and spokespeople. “The junior Angus program allows us to cultivate good young people to play an integral part in the beef industry,” he says. Even if NJAA members choose careers unrelated to agriculture, McCulloh believes junior members can go on to provide an industry perspective to a growing population with a limited production-agriculture background.

“The knowledge they gain from National Junior Angus Association activities will help tell the story,” says McCulloh, a past Iowa Junior Angus Association president and current Foundation Board representative. McCulloh, also a former director of junior activities, has been a part-owner of Woodhill Farms since leaving the Association staff in 1984. “This program is giving the beef industry an additional lobby throughout all sectors.”

Undeniably, goodwill ambassadors will be needed well into the next century as the beef industry attempts to overcome major obstacles relating to food safety, nutrition and the environment, to name only a few.

Kyla Hall Olson, NJAA Director

from 1990 to 1992, daily addresses consumer misconceptions about beef. She works as director of retail and foodservice programs for the Nebraska Beef Council.

“Even from a very young age, I thought we needed positive people talking favorably about our industry,” she says. This former Nebraska Junior Angus Association member grew up on an Angus ranch in north-central Nebraska and became active in the state organization at age 12. She later held several leadership positions, including NJAA Board communications director.

In college Olson pursued an undergraduate degree in family and consumer science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She taught family consumer sciences at the high-school level for one year, then she returned for her master’s degree.

When the job opportunity became available at the Nebraska Beef Council in 1997, Olson knew it could be a perfect fit.

“I thought, this is my opportunity to make a contribution to an industry that has been very good to me,” she says. “For me, my participation in the National Junior Angus Association was just an amazing personal-growth experience, and it fostered a desire to want to make a contribution to the beef industry.”

In addition to her professional position, Olson continues to share an interest in her family’s registered Angus and commercial cattle program, Hall Ranch.

“At a time when the industry is changing rapidly and we continue to have to answer to the public about our product, we need as many strong spokespeople as we can train,” she says. Youth organizations such as the NJAA can foster a lifelong interest in the industry and help develop skills and knowledge needed. “At the same time, the NJAA can build strong future leaders for both the cattle industry and the Angus breed and assure that we still have a place as a very significant economic industry in the United States.”

great people and learn a lot of skills to prepare them in life, then they need to encourage them to participate in the NJAA,” Nida says. “If that member has a

love for agriculture and Angus cattle, then they are going to be successful in this program even if they don’t win a class or contest every time.”

